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THE CEILING OF THE OPISTHODOMUS OF THE THESEUM

THE Theseum is the best preserved of all Greek temples; it has, however, suffered to a considerable extent in its upper portions. The construction of the ceilings of the peristyles, pronaos, probably, and opisthodomus, as will be shown, were of the usual type — marble beams supporting marble coffers, the whole protected by a sloping roof of tiles on wooden rafters and beams. The ceilings of the peristyles are in an excellent state of preservation. In Byzantine times the interior of the temple was converted into a church of St. George and roofed with a

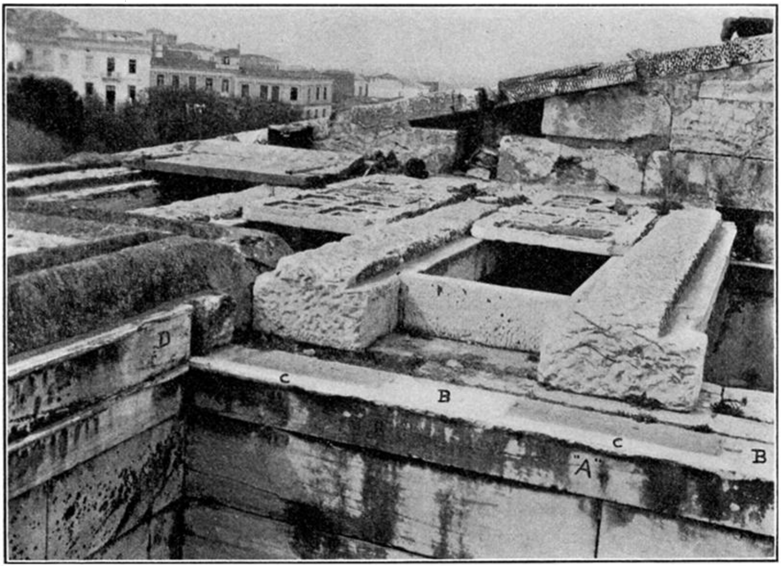

FIGURE 1. — CEILING OF THE WESTERN PORTICO OF THE THESEUM, LOOKING SOUTHWEST.

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barrel-vault. An apse was thrown out into the pronaos, so that to-day one cannot tell how the latter was originally covered. The ceiling of the opisthodomus, on the other hand, had no Byzantine walls constructed beneath it. This part of the temple is now entirely open to the heavens, and the walls that surround it are, for the most part, unobstructed above. It seems strange that the ceiling of this opisthodomus should have been published incorrectly,[1] for the arrangement of the beams is obvious.

A glance at the photographs (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) will show that the upper surface of course "*A*" has been dressed to receive two beam-ends on either side of the axis of the temple — the beam-ends resting at *B* and *B*, and the separators at *C* and *C*. The study of the dowels and pry holes on the top of course

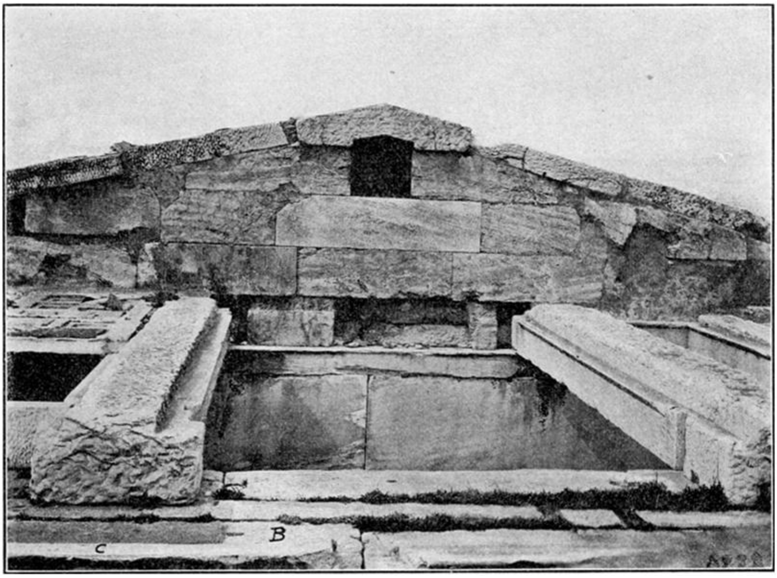

Figure 2. — Ceiling of the Western Portico of the Theseum, looking West.

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[1] See J. G. Frazer, *Pausanias's Description of Greece*, Vol. II, p. 155, for a comprehensive list of writers on the Theseum. The only publication I can find of this part of the ceiling is Canina, *L'Architettura Greca*, Tav. XCIV, where the beams are quite incorrectly represented as prolongations of the beams over the western peristyle.

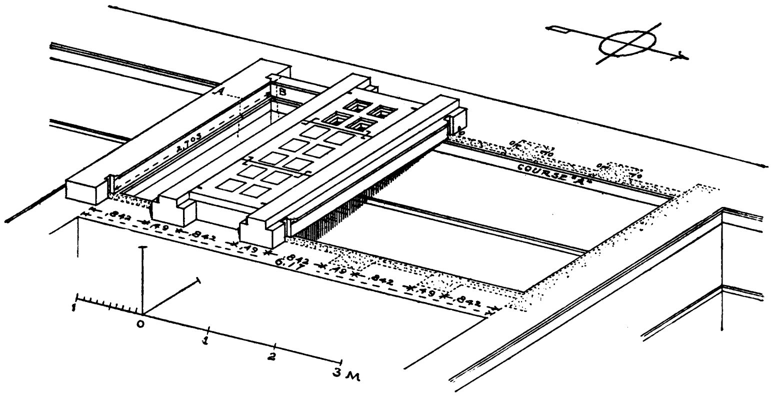
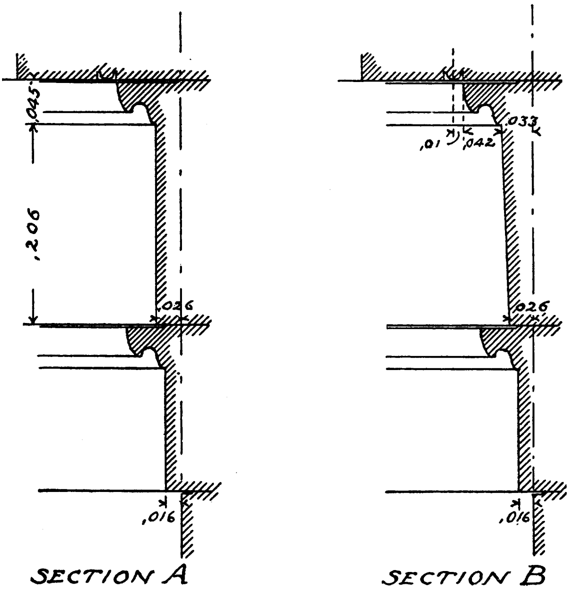


FIGURE 3. — CEILING CONSTRUCTION OF THE OPISTHODOMUS OF THE THESEUM. ISOMETRIC.

"*A*" further corroborates this distribution of beams. The beams were of marble; the pry holes, dowels, and the width of the beams prove this.

In Figure 1 it will be noticed that at *D* the moulding directly



SECTION *A* SECTION *B*

FIGURE 4. — SECTIONS *A* AND *B*, FIGURE 3.

under the coffer-blocks is preserved. This moulding must have been continued on the adjoining separator and again on the nearest beam, for the moulding should have mitred around these surfaces, as in similar places over the west portico (see the same photograph) and in all the other stone ceilings of the building.

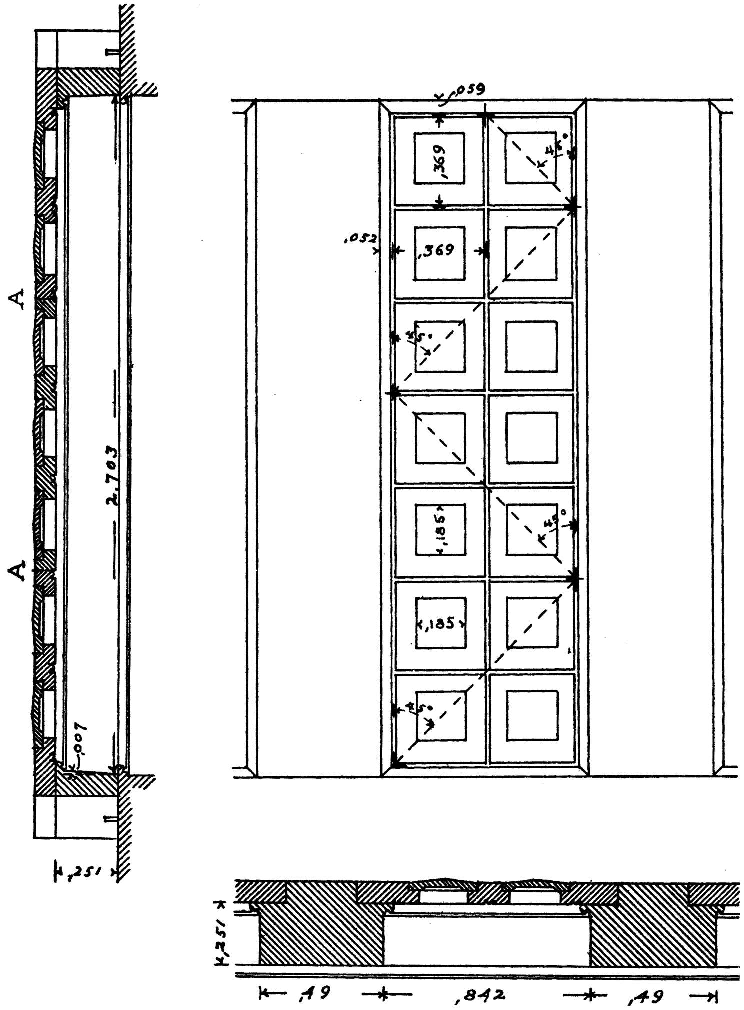


FIGURE 5. — PLAN AND SECTIONS THROUGH THE BEAMS AND COFFERS OF THE OPISTHODOMUS OF THE THESEUM.

Figure 3 represents in isometric drawing these various facts. The pry holes and dowels in the top of course "*A*" make it clear that the three northerly beams were first pried into their exact positions and dowelled; then the separators were dropped into place, and last of all the coffer-blocks were laid on top of the beams and separators.

Figure 4 gives the two sections[1] necessary for a restoration of one compartment of the ceiling (see *A* and *B*, Fig. 3). Figure 5 gives this restoration. That the coffers were of marble is shown by the dressing of the upper surface of block *D* (Fig. 1), where the pressure from the coffer block is so arranged as not to endanger the moulding below (see Fig. 4), a precaution hardly necessary if the coffers had been of wood.

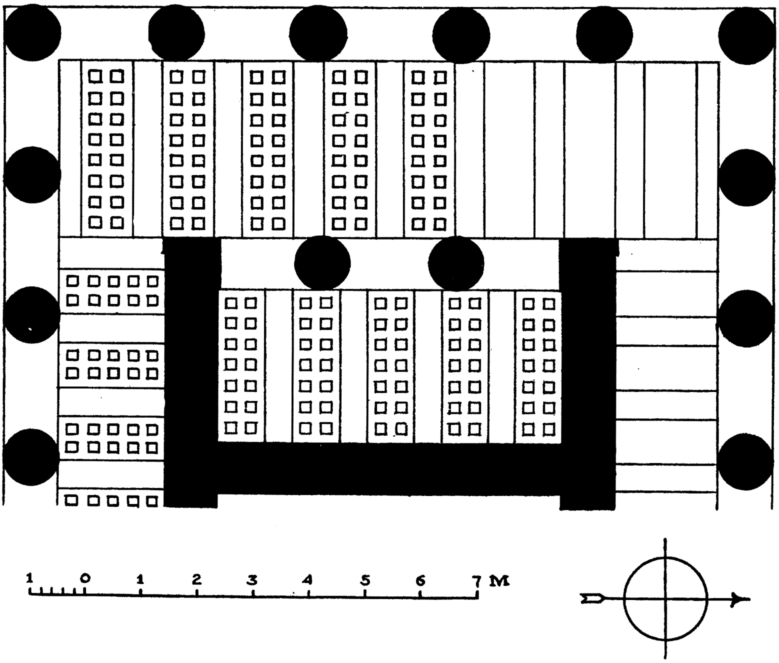


Figure 6. — Ceiling Plans of the Opisthodomus, Western and Side Peristyles of the Theseum.

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[1] In regard to section *B*, it should be noted that the separator tips inward at the top, a fact obtained from the cutting for a separator near the west end of surface *D*, Fig. 1.

Now, although there are no coffers remaining, still their restoration may be attempted with a considerable degree of certainty. For, first, from a comparison with other temples having marble ceilings, one would expect to find in this opisthodomus a ceiling similar in type and material to the ceilings of the ends and sides. Secondly, the marble coffers along the north and south sides of the temple are of exactly the same design and material as those of the east and west ends, differing from them only slightly in size. Therefore it would seem natural to suppose that the same type of coffer was used over the opisthodomus as over the sides and ends. This would give two rows of seven *square* coffers for each compartment, as shown in Figure 5; the fact that the coffers prove to be squares being a strong argument in favor of this restoration. Taking the same relative proportion as in the other ceilings, the coffers here would be 0.185 m. square — those of the east and west ends are 0.207 m., and those of north and south sides 0.178 m. Figure 6 gives this restored ceiling in its relation to those of the west end and the sides.

In all the other ceilings of this temple each compartment of coffers is composed of slabs, pierced with either four or six coffers; the slabs are dowelled to the beams, and the slabs of the east and west ceilings are clamped together. Therefore in Figure 3 a similar construction has been adopted for the restored compartments. The joints, which would necessarily have been seen from beneath to a certain extent, have been concealed as well as possible (see *A*, Fig. 5), the method being the same as in the other coffer-blocks of the temple — the joint at the side of, and partially concealed by, a small sunk moulding.

Thus the ceiling of the opisthodomus may be restored with certainty, so far as the beams are concerned, and with a high degree of probability in regard to the coffers.

GORHAM PHILLIPS STEVENS.

NEW YORK, 1910.